

NEWS RELEASE

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Former Horace Mann Employee Charged with Embezzlement

Springfield, Illinois – Rodger A. Heaton, United States Attorney for the Central District of Illinois, announced that a federal grand jury has returned an indictment charging Gerri E. Ripka, age 50, of Springfield, Illinois, with embezzling and misappropriating more than \$150,000 from Horace Mann Insurance Companies, most of which was intended for United Way of Central Illinois.

According to the indictment, Ripka was the Assistant to a Horace Mann executive from 1990 until she resigned on November 15, 2004. Between approximately 1999 and her resignation, Ripka was also the Bookkeeper and Coordinator for Horace Mann's annual United Way Campaign.

The indictment alleges that, as part of its United Way Campaign, Horace Mann entrusted Ripka with a company credit card, a special company checking account, and cash that Horace Mann and its employees collected annually for donation to United Way. Ripka's embezzlements allegedly began in approximately 1999 when she became the Coordinator of Horace Mann's United Way Campaign and continued until Ripka resigned from Horace Mann.

The indictment alleges that Ripka embezzled money from the company in three different ways, by cashing company checks, using the company credit card for personal purchases, and stealing cash that was collected at special fund-raising events. According to the indictment, Ripka embezzled most of the money by writing and cashing approximately 328 company checks for around \$145,735. She is charged with having converted most of that cash to her own use and reimbursing the company only \$2,489. (More)

Ripka allegedly used the company credit card approximately 450 times for personal purchases worth more than \$39,000. She also used the credit card to purchase at a shopping mall more than \$5,000 worth of gift cards, which she used herself. Ripka allegedly caused Horace Mann to pay the credit card bills without reporting that her purchases were not for the benefit of Horace Mann or United Way.

According to the indictment, Ripka also converted to her own use more than \$45,000 that was collected by Horace Mann employees during special fund-raising events for United Way.

In announcing the indictment, U.S. Attorney Rodger Heaton stated, “This case is the product of impressive cooperation between business and government. As soon as Horace Mann officials discovered the alleged embezzlements, they thoroughly investigated the matter and referred it to our office. They cooperated fully with the FBI and our office’s investigation. I specifically commend Horace Mann and its executives for bringing this matter to our attention and for giving white collar crime no higher regard than street crime.”

Members of the public are reminded that an indictment is merely an accusation; the defendant is presumed innocent unless proven guilty.

If convicted, the offense of embezzlement carries a statutory penalty of up to 10 years imprisonment and a fine of up to \$250,000.

The case was investigated by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Assistant U.S. Attorney Joseph H. Hartzler is prosecuting the case.